



Be Still, And Know That I Am God

by
Harry Foster



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Be Still And Know That I Am God

"Be still, and know that I am God"

(Ps. 46:10).

*"In returning and rest shall ye be saved;
in quietness and in confidence shall be
your strength"*

(Isaiah 30:15).

The men who spoke these words were no mere theorists. They had personal proofs of the mighty working of God for those who wait upon Him and wait for Him. God Himself is no mere theorist. He is only interested in that which has vital and spiritual results. He invites us to know—that is, to prove—that He is indeed God almighty. He also shows us how we may come to this

knowledge. It is by obeying His command, "Be still".

What does it mean to "be still"? Perhaps it will help us if we consider some occasions in which God's people passed through such experiences, times in which they were reduced to silence, and as a result had marvelous proofs that He is indeed the living God.

VICTORY AT JERICHO

A notable instance of this was what took place at the fall of Jericho. When those great fortress-walls fell flat, it was abundantly evident that God is God. This, however, did not happen until God's people had first passed through the severe discipline of quietness and confidence. "And Joshua commanded the

people, saying, 'Ye shall not shout nor let your voice be heard, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout...' " (Joshua 6:10). In this threefold command Joshua insisted that the people were not to shout, not to converse, not even to whisper, while they continued their daily march around the citadel.

This seems to be a good illustration of the spiritual truth which we are seeking to grasp, for it makes it clear that to "be still" does not mean to be paralyzed, to be idle, to be passive. For their silence was part of their activity of faith. Every day they rose early, and every day they walked right round Jericho's walls. But as they walked there was a special manner in which they had to proceed, they had to maintain

complete silence. As they looked up at those massive fortifications, they must have been tempted to comment on their impossible task. This was not allowed. They may have felt the kind of emotions which make us want to speak, to say something, to say anything, only to speak in order to keep up our spirits. This was also forbidden. Divine power is not produced by human optimism. Other matters may have sprung to their minds, the happenings of the past, or the prospects for the future. No! to begin to chatter would have dissipated their spiritual concentration, distracting them from the one issue in hand. Their march had to be in quietness and in confidence. They had to keep marching, but also they had to be still. The only sound was that of the trumpets, which were blown as a

simple affirmation of faith in the Lord's power.

Such affirmations are a part, and a necessary part, of our quiet confidence in the Lord. But when we talk, it is so often to reason, to argue, to complain about failures or to offer suggestions as to what should be done. When God's people spend their time talking there is little or no evidence of God's power among them. They may decide to their satisfaction what is wrong. They may even know what is right. But they fail to know the one thing which matters, and that is that He is God. For that it is necessary to be still.

THE VALLEY OF BLESSING

Another outstanding illustration of

this principle was found in the experience of king Jehoshaphat, as described in 2 Chronicles 20. He and his people were in an extremely perilous situation. The king had, on a previous occasion, committed a very grave spiritual error, so grave that a prophet had met him with a stern rebuke, saying: "For this thing wrath is upon thee from the Lord" (2 Chronicles 19:2). Nevertheless, Jehoshaphat had a sincere desire to please God, a thing which the Lord always looks for and appreciates when He finds it. When the news came of the impending great calamity (20:4), the king humbled himself, and called all the people to do the same.

As "All Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children", Jehoshaphat confessed,

"We have no might against this great company... neither know we what to do". How different was this from his earlier impulsive offer to go and fight with Ahab (18:3)! Then he had been full of self-confidence; now he openly admitted his complete inadequacy. Then his eyes had been on himself and on his allies; now he was reduced to bare faith in God, looking only to Him (20:12).

For him there was no hope, except in the utter mercy of God. He had no merits to plead, no advice to offer, no strength to provide. It must be God or nothing. How the Lord delights to bless men when they are reduced to such straits! There, as they stood in lowliness of confessed need, the Spirit of God came on one of their number, and he stood up to give God's answer to Judah, to

Jerusalem and to Jehoshaphat, "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle; set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you..." (20:17).

So it proved. With the king's exhortation to accept this message, and believe in the Lord their God, the people moved out towards their enemies, singing, "Give thanks unto the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever". They were still, not with the frightened paralysis of unbelief, but with quiet confidence in the Lord of hosts who was with them. In their stillness, they proved that He is indeed God.

One of the great lessons of this incident is that we may, and must, hope in God's mercy. If Jehoshaphat had listened to Satanic accusations

concerning his past he would either have tried to justify himself or been overwhelmed by despair. He did neither. When we humbly hope in God, then He takes up our case. The battle is not ours, but His, and though we may be both unworthy and inadequate, He is ready to prove His godhead to those who in simple faith obey His revealed Word.

AT CANA OF GALILEE

It might be thought that such illustrations are limited to the Old Testament, and are therefore very remote from our own circumstances. A study of the Gospels will show that the same principles obtained in New Testament days, and that the Lord Jesus called on men to obey the psalmist's command, to

be still and know that He (Jesus) is true God.

The first of these which will spring to the mind of Bible students, is the turning of the water to wine at Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11). Once again human wisdom and resource were at a discount. We are told that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was present, but it seems probable that she was more or less in charge of the proceedings. At least she knew of the lack of wine when even the ruler of the feast was unaware of it, and it was she who felt impelled to urge the Lord Jesus to do something for them.

Doubtless her words were well intentioned, yet they met a rebuke from the Lord. He could not work under her, nor would He act in compliance with her suggestions. His hour could not come

until she had ceased from all such efforts and handed the whole affair over to Him. And this she did, with such happy results. "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it", she ordered the servants, making it clear that she was no longer in charge, nor need they expect any more orders from her. "It is better to leave the matter in my hands", the Lord Jesus had told her (v. 4, Weymouth). It is indeed, but how hard for our chafing spirits to accept that rebuke. How difficult it is for us to *be still*! By God's grace, Mary was able to do it, with the result that she and the disciples had their first glimpse of Christ's glory—they knew that He was God. So may we. First, though, we have to learn to cease from our own fretfulness and fuss, our own attempts to solve the problem, even from telling the

Lord what we think He ought to do. Then, and only then, does His hour come, and His glory is seen.

IN THE WILDERNESS

This same Gospel of the fulness gives its own special account of the feeding of the five thousand. It lays stress that those hungry multitudes could only be fed if they first sat down. "Jesus said, Make the people sit down... So the men sat down... Jesus therefore... distributed to them that were sat down" (John 6:10, 11). What does it mean, this reiteration of the fact that the miracle was not performed until all the five thousand were seated on the grass? Is it not a further example of the condition laid down by the psalmist for finding out by

experience that He is God? "Be still!" Be still from your advice to send the people away! Be still from your questions as to why and how you should be asked to give them to eat! Be still from your arithmetical calculations about money required, and from your arguments that the five small loaves are so insufficient! "Be still, and know that I am God."

It was the disciples, as well as the multitudes, who needed to find a place of rest. Their agitation was doubtless well intentioned. It was the natural reaction in such a moment of stress. We modern disciples are no better than they, and often we ourselves are under pressure which though well meant can only move us from quiet confidence in our Lord. We are urged that we must act. We are told that it is up to us. We are condemned for

wanting to pray instead of doing something. There are always so many arguments which appear spiritual and which can be backed by suitable texts, but which are the opposite of what the psalmist calls for.

In *The Life of Hudson Taylor* we read of how his chief companion on pioneering journeys, Mr. Duncan, found himself stranded in Nanking, with no possibility of financial help reaching him. As the last piece of silver had to be changed, the anxious cook asked him what they should do when the money was all gone. "Do?", was Duncan's quiet reply; "We will trust in the Lord and do good, and verily we shall be fed." And so it proved. What was true in Palestine at the beginning of the era, was equally true in China in 1867, and it is still true in

London in 1962. If we maintain our confidence, the Lord will display His power.

PENTECOST

The Gospel period came to an end. It was followed by the new dispensation in which God's servants now have Divine power indwelling them by the Holy Spirit. Does this mean that the old basis of proving God has passed? Do the men of the New Covenant have to act in a different way? The answer is, No. The very same basis of proving the power and presence of God still holds. The book of the Acts will bring all the evidence we need to prove this point. We quote two examples, the first of them being Pentecost itself.

What were the disciples doing when the Spirit came so mightily upon them? Were they planning? Certainly not, for they evidently had no ideas of their own as to how the Lord's command to evangelize could be fulfilled. Were they discussing? No, not then! They had already talked a great deal about the composition of the apostolic band, and had discussed their sense of what the Scriptures taught in this connection. Whether or not they were right in feeling that it was incumbent on them to complete the Twelve, and whether their action in choosing Matthias was either correct or necessary, must remain a matter of opinion. In any case, by the time that the day of Pentecost had fully come, such considerations and actions had come to an end. They do not seem to

have been talking to one another. Were they perhaps praying? We cannot say for certain, but it seems very doubtful. It is true that earlier they are described as continuing steadfastly in prayer (Acts 1:14), but we would expect that if Jews were praying they would either be on their knees or on their feet. In this case we know that they were neither.

The sole indication given to us is the simple disclosure of the fact that they were sitting in the house (Acts 2:2). Had they talked themselves to a standstill? It is quite possible. Had they exhausted the matters for prayer? Or better, had they prayed through to such an assurance that now they only had to wait confidently for the answer? We do not know. What we do know is that they were "sitting"—just sitting! That is all that the Holy Spirit

sees fit to record. But evidently this was considered important enough to mention. Can it not be because this is in keeping with what we have already been saying? Is this because they were obeying the psalmist's exhortation to "Be still"? There is no doubt about the rest of his statement—"and know that I am God". There was a wonderful demonstration of how great God is, for as they sat in the house, there came to this earth one of the most astounding evidences of the reality of the Divine presence that has ever taken place. "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost." In the days that followed there was no lack of action. The disciples were busy enough. But the action was Divine action, it proved that God is God, and it came to those who had first learned to be silent in His

presence.

PETER IN PRISON

From Pentecost until today, this same spiritual experience has been repeated again and again. Peter himself proved the power of God in a remarkable way, as in this spirit he waited patiently for the Lord. His own words were, "Now I know of a truth that the Lord hath sent forth his angel, and delivered me..." (Acts 12:11). His case had been quite desperate, but the miraculous rescue came to make plain that God is indeed God. Shut up in a dungeon, closely guarded as well as chained, on the very eve of impending execution, he had come face to face with ultimate things. Then, in a wonderful way, chains had

fallen off, prison doors had opened of their own accord, and he was free. There was only one explanation. He had proved the reality of God's living power. Peter had known for a long time that God is the great Reality, but that night he came to know it as never before. "Now I know...."

What was his own contribution to this great happening? We know, of course, that what took place was brought about by the faithful and earnest prayer of the church. This however, is not what we are now considering. We want to know what Peter did. The matter is not left to our conjectures, for we are told the simple truth, "Peter was sleeping" (Acts 12:6). This may surprise us. Ought not Peter to have been wrestling in prayer? Clearly he did not think so. No doubt he

had prayed before falling asleep, but it must have been a simple prayer of quiet confidence. "In returning and in rest" he was saved. God worked while he slept. It may even be true to say that God worked because he slept.

We may be inclined to blame Peter for this deep sleep which was so sound that the angel had to hit him in order to wake him from it. So to sleep at such a time may seem very unspiritual. Nevertheless if we put ourselves in his place, we may well ask ourselves if we would have done the same thing in those circumstances. Much lesser trials than his have a way of robbing us of sleep. We can talk, we can think, we can even pray; but the one thing which we do not seem able to do is to relax into sound and peaceful sleep. So it seems likely that

Peter's action, far from being unspiritual, was the best way of expressing triumphant faith. On the basis of such heart-rest and quiet confidence, the Lord finds His best opportunities of showing His power and Godhead.

So Peter's name must be added to the list of those who have received outstanding proofs of how right it is to put our affairs in the Lord's hands, to cast all our burdens on the Lord, to refuse anxiety and fret, and to exercise restful confidence in Him.

"Be still", the psalmist had commanded. Peter obeyed the command. He was still. "And know that I am God", was the promise given through the psalmist, a promise which Peter proved to be reliable and trustworthy. "Now I know...", he said, and in saying it,

encouraged all of us who are in trouble as he was, with no human hope of help. The psalmist's God was Peter's God, and He is our God too. We shall gather fresh proofs that He is the great Reality if we can learn the essential lesson of quietness and confidence. "Be still, and know that I am God."

H.F.



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